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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000424

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/11/2015
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: REENERGIZED ANTI-SENATE MDC WING PLANS INCREASED
RESISTANCE

REF: A. REF A: HARARE 355

[1](#)B. REF B: HARARE 95

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In a series of separate meetings with the Ambassador, leaders of the anti-Senate faction of the MDC depicted an opposition party that was reenergized by a successful Congress and prepared to confront the regime with greater energy and focus. Morgan Tsvangirai said he would conduct nationwide rallies to maintain momentum, especially outside of the capital, noting that the regime's weakening security forces would be stretched by such tactics. Tsvangirai added that there had been no discussions for several weeks with the rival pro-Senate MDC faction. He said the respective Congresses had shown who had the public's support.

[1](#)2. (C) Echoing Tsvangirai's support for stepped up resistance, Secretary General Tendai Biti and Organizing Secretary Elias Mudzuri separately said that they were

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working intensively to rebuild the party's infrastructure, damaged by the split, and this would pave the way for more vigorous opposition to the regime soon after. Secretary for Information Nelson Chamisa added that the party was trying to develop better communication strategies and training supporters to overcome fears of security force violence in preparation for demonstrations. Separately, the Ambassador also met in the same time period with MDC MP David Coltart. Coltart claimed to still be neutral but leaning towards the pro-Senate faction, calling the anti-Senate faction's leadership weak. End Summary.

Tsvangirai: Congress Builds Momentum Against Regime

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13. (C) Tsvangirai told the Ambassador on March 29 that the party's Congress (ref A) had emboldened the opposition and granted its leadership a renewed mandate to confront the regime. The number of attendees had exceeded even the party's own expectations, and established which of the MDC's factions had the support of the people. This was doubly significant in that most of the 18,000 delegates paid their own way to the Congress. Asked by the Ambassador how the party planned to maintain the momentum following the Congress, Tsvangirai said that he would launch a series of rallies nationwide to introduce the party's new leadership and to build support for resistance. (N.B. According to independent media accounts, rallies in Gweru and Masvingo held during the weekend of April 1-2 drew a combined 20,000 supporters. Meanwhile, a rally in Harare's high-density suburb of Chitungwiza over the past weekend drew another 20,000 supporters, Tsvangirai's largest crowd ever there. Adding to the significance of these crowds is the large number of older men and women, as opposed to most rallies that are traditionally attended by mostly younger men.)

14. (C) The Congress had acknowledged the limitations on pursuing power solely through the electoral route and had endorsed stepped up resistance to the regime through all peaceful means, including disobedience and civil resistance, according to Tsvangirai. He agreed with the Ambassador's comment that we seem to be witnessing the dying days of the regime, adding that recognition of this has generated renewed willingness among the people to confront ZANU-PF, especially given the country's economic problems.

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15. (C) After the party had gone through a brief period of institution building, Tsvangirai said the MDC and its civil society partners would create an "eye of the storm" in Harare and Bulawayo, but would not neglect the rural areas) "the regime's Achilles' heel," according to Tsvangirai - where the people were increasingly disgusted with the government and the security forces were stretched thin. The party planned to develop strategies to exploit the regime's relative weakness outside the two largest urban areas to further stretch their resources prior to tackling the capital city. Tsvangirai admitted the urban-based MDC had not previously

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done enough party building and organizational work, especially in the rural districts, but was setting about remedying this mistake.

16. (C) Replying to the Ambassador's question about efforts to address the MDC split, Tsvangirai said it was no longer an issue. He added that there had been no overtures concerning reunification or amicable divorce for several weeks. The two factions would likely go their separate ways for the time being. Referring to some in the diplomatic community who bemoan the MDC's factionalism, Tsvangirai said that those who had emphasized the split had missed the real objective, which was to develop a more coherent approach within his wing of the MDC in order to better confront the regime. He agreed with the Ambassador's suggestion that two factions could potentially cover more political ground as separate parties with different approaches but a common goal. Tsvangirai also suggested that an alliance before the next elections might also still be possible.

Biti: Shoring Up Party's Foundation

¶7. (C) Secretary General Tendai Biti on April 3 confirmed for the Ambassador that the anti-Senate faction's new leadership team was united and committed to confronting the regime. He said his particular focus would be rebuilding the party's institutions to better support a sustained campaign of resistance. Biti acknowledged that the split had damaged the party's institutions. He was especially critical of pro-Senate members of the former leadership who had taken computers, cars, and even the keys from the party's headquarters in Harare.

¶8. (C) Biti said even the phones were not working and that the party was heavily in debt with few resources. Still, he has confidence that he could clean the mess up in a few months. Noting that the new Treasurer, Roy Bennett, may have to remain outside of the country for the time being, Biti said he could prove useful as a fund raiser among the Zimbabwean diaspora, adding that according to the party's new constitutional amendments, external assemblies needed to be created in countries with large diasporas and Bennett might organize those as well.

¶9. (C) Asked by the Ambassador for an update on his earlier efforts to secure an amicable divorce between the two factions (ref B), Biti replied that Welshman Ncube had recently contacted him, but echoing Tsvangirai, Biti said the issue had been placed on the backburner. Biti added that there were already stark divisions emerging within the pro-Senate faction, chiefly over the leadership of Arthur Mutambara, who was not the faction's first, second, or even third choice. The self-promoting Mutambara and the manipulative Ncube were destined to clash, to the detriment of that faction.

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Mudzuri: Using New Position To Strengthen Grassroots

¶10. (C) The new Organizing Secretary (and ousted Mayor of Harare) Elias Mudzuri on March 23 told the Ambassador that his role in revitalizing the party was to use his grass roots appeal to mobilize people for democratic resistance. Mudzuri said he would be returning to Harvard for a few months to complete his Mason Fellowship leading to a Masters in Public Policy and Management but expected to be back in Harare by early summer to take up his new duties. Meanwhile, his deputy would be working full time on organization issues. Responding to Mudzuri's plea for continued assistance, the Ambassador replied that the USG was committed to helping Zimbabwe and briefed Mudzuri on the range of USG programs in support of civil society and democratic forces in Zimbabwe.

Chamisa: Publicity Crucial To The Struggle

¶11. (C) Secretary for Information and Harare MP Nelson Chamisa on April 4 told the Ambassador that the party had developed a program to prepare for challenging the regime. This program included videos of successful peaceful resistance in other countries to help people overcome their fear and prepare for possible outcomes, including arrests, injury, or even death. Chamisa confirmed that he, Tsangirai, and other MDC leaders would place themselves personally at the forefront of mass action in order to inspire and give confidence to their supporters.

¶12. (C) Chamisa added an unsolicited plug for the Voice of America's (VOA) Studio 7 news broadcasts. He said that although ZANU-PF was more divided than any of the opposition parties, its control over the media enabled the ruling party to hide its fractures. In that regard, Studio 7 provided the critical service of exposing the GOZ's cracks. Commenting

that "without VOA we are done," Chamisa said that Studio 7 would help to galvanize participation in mass action. The Ambassador offered Chamisa assistance in developing his skills as a press spokesman, which Chamisa gladly accepted.

Coltart: The Dissenter's View

¶13. (C) The Ambassador also met with MDC MP David Coltart, on March 30. Coltart claimed he had remained neutral in the MDC split, refusing to attend either Congress and refusing to accept his election by the pro-Senate faction to a leadership position. That said, he reiterated his earlier claim to the Ambassador that while Tsvangirai clearly enjoyed the support of the masses the pro-Senate faction had the lion's share of the MDC talent. Coltart said with the exception of Biti, the people who surrounded Tsvangirai were incompetent or worse and that even if they could organize mass action the informers among them would reveal those plans to the GOZ.

Comment

¶14. (C) Over the past three weeks we have had a chance to meet with most of the leadership of both MDC factions. In our considered opinion, Coltart's analysis is wrong. There is a great deal of talent and energy among the anti-Senate faction's senior leadership. In fact, they were far more impressive as a group than their pro-Senate opposite numbers.

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Moreover, they were also remarkably unified in their message to the Ambassador as opposed to the obvious tensions that have already crept into the Mutambara/Ncube relationship. Indeed, it has to be said that Mutambara seems to have inherited undiminished the rivalries and divergent views that formerly hamstrung Tsvangirai.

¶15. (C) Coltart is right, however, that Tsvangirai's faction has the grass roots appeal, which the recent Congresses made abundantly clear, and we believe that they are therefore better placed to put pressure on the regime. Both MDC factions clearly sense the opportunity before them: a weakened regime and a restive population. Both have committed themselves publicly and privately to confronting the regime, including through a campaign of peaceful democratic resistance. However, only one faction, Tsvangirai's, presently has the necessary internal unity and

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external popularity to lead such an effort. Mutambara has an uphill struggle ahead in building a popular base of support as evidenced by the small and declining attendance at his rallies) in Chitungwiza he drew only 1,000 supporters a week before Tsvangirai's rally, according to the press. Moreover, Tsvangirai's defiant statement on April 9 in Bulawayo that he is not afraid of death if it is the price of freedom in response to recent public death threats from Mugabe appears to have emboldened a population until recently cowed by GOZ oppression. Of course, we have heard the bold talk before and it has led to little, so it remains to be seen whether this time will be any different. That said, we were struck by the unity evident among Tsvangirai's group, as well as by Tsvangirai's seeming focus and quiet determination, without the empty bravura of some past performances.

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